THE
MEADOWLARK
A newsletter for those involved with Wisconsin's Glacial Habitat Restoration Area
Volume 1, Issue 2 Fall 2001

'Tis the Season…

By Brenda Hill
WDNR Biologist, Horicon

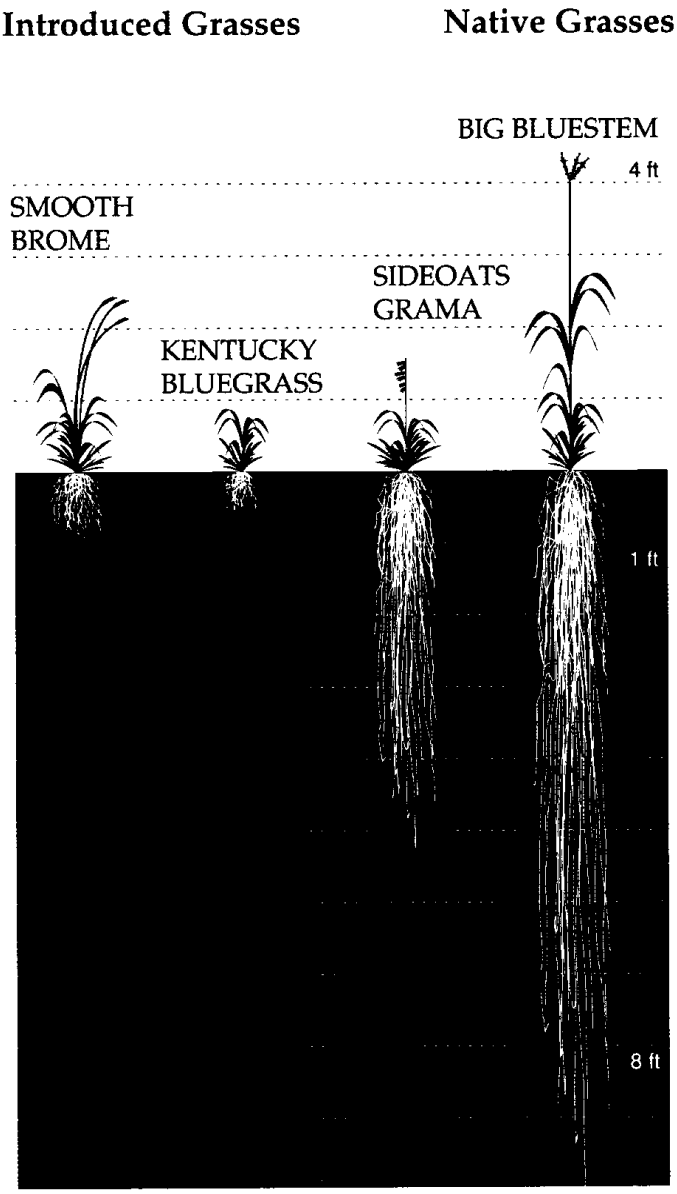
The 2001 field season is drawing to a close. So you ask, "What does that mean?"

The following are just a few things that your GHRA staff has been busy working on. First on our list was burning over 750 acres of land. The prescribed burns were conducted to rejuvenate established prairie plantings or to prepare new sites for planting. Although conditions suitable for burning seemed few and far between, with a couple of long days and some cooperation from Mother Nature, we were able to complete most burns on our list.

Next on the list was preparing for the prairie planting season. With approximately 1000 acres to plant, our first task was to create our grass and wildflower mix. A preview for what you'll see sprouting up in those 2001 restorations includes grasses such as: Canada wild rye, Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass, while the wildflowers include Ox Eye Sunflower, Bergamot, Yellow Coneflower, Leadplant, Purple Prairie Clover, Black Eyed Susan, and Rattlesnake Master. In total, we mixed in 21 different species of wildflowers.

Continued on page 3

Root Comparison of Native Vs Introduced Grasses



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

By Dave Neu
Regional Biologist, NWTF

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) has developed Wild Turkey Woodlands, a new program to help private landowners. The program recognizes individual and corporate landowners that manage for wild turkeys and other wildlife on their farms and woodlands. It is available to landowners who own ten acres or more, and allow hunting on their properties. This program is free and offers a variety of benefits.

Wildlife does not have to be the landowner's primary objective. Many landowners manage their lands to produce revenue from farming or forest products as well as providing for wildlife. The Wild Turkey Woodlands program will help landowners meet both objectives.

One benefit of the program is an 18-inch color sign landowners receive when they are accepted into the program. With it, landowners send a strong community message about their active support for wildlife on the property. Also, a Wild Turkey Woodlands certificate, suitable for framing, will show those visiting homes or offices that the land is managed for wildlife.

Participants will receive a newsletter packed with management tips for private landowners. In addition, regional workshops will be available to provide landowners hands-on advice about management options. Certified landowners can also take advantage of discounted seeds and seedlings to help with their land management through the NWTF's Project HELP. This program includes reduced prices on the NWTF's Strut and Rut seed mixes and Turkey Gold Chufa, the organization's most popular planting.

To enroll, applicants must submit a written plan and map that document the practices and goals for managing wildlife, timber, soil and water, and hunting on the property. Landowners may develop their own plans using the NWTF's "Get in the Game" CD, or use plans developed through DNR or federal programs, such as the Stewardship Incentives Program or Forest Stewardship Program. Annually, regional and national awards will showcase the top landowner's efforts to manage for wild turkeys and other wildlife.

Attracting and keeping wildlife on your land is not complicated. Build the habitat, and the wildlife will come. The Wild Turkey Woodlands program will help you build your wildlife habitat while helping you manage the other products your land produces.

For more information, and an application for the Wild Turkey Woodlands program, contact Dave Neu, NWTF Regional Biologist, 203 Cedar St., Neenah, WI 54956. Email - neunwtf@aol.com.

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WILDLIFE RESTORATION
Federal Aid Project
funded by your purchase of
hunting equipment

WISCONSIN'S NAVIGABLE WATERS - TRESPASSING OR LEGAL ACCESS?

By Kristy Rogers
WDNR Water Management Specialist-Oshkosh

Am I trespassing if I paddle my canoe deep into a marsh on the Rock River? How about when I wade through a small stream that sometimes dries up? If someone yells at me to "Get off their property", are they within their rights? Well the answer is a clear maybe.

The Public Trust Doctrine, the Wisconsin Constitution, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and years of case law have protected the public's ability to fish, hunt, recreate, and view Wisconsin's navigable waterways. So what's a navigable waterway? Navigable waterways are those waterways that are "capable of floating any boat, skiff, or canoe, of the shallowest draft used for recreational purposes" on a re-occurring basis.

You now know exactly where you can go, right? Well don't feel bad, the experts are often confused as well! Below are some commonly asked questions and answers that will help you determine if you're within your rights or if you are trespassing:

1. *Is this a navigable waterway?* Some waterways can obviously float a canoe while others often dry up except during spring and fall. If there is a doubt as to whether or not the waterway is navigable contact your local Conservation Warden or Water Management Specialist.
2. *If it's navigable can I always use it – what are the limits?* The key is to keep your feet wet. If the stream has dried up – navigable or not, you may not use it as access. If the stream is flooded you may use the flooded area – just keep your feet wet.
3. *If there is an obstruction like a beaver dam or culvert what do I do?* Obstructions, natural or manmade, can be bypassed. You must use the shortest path around the obstruction – always remember that the upland is private property. You must respect the rights of the private property owners.
4. *Where are legal access points to navigable waterways?* Navigable waterways can be accessed through private property with permission from the owner. Public road crossings of navigable waterways are also excellent access points. With a little research, un-advertised, unknown access points can be found by reviewing plats at your local planning and zoning office.
5. *A wetland restoration project has just created a large marsh area – is this open for public access?* These areas are open to public access if they are connected, hydrologically (keep your feet wet), to a navigable waterway. These types of projects vary as to the construction design to prevent or provide public access. If you have found an area that you would like to access but are unsure to your legal rights – call your Conservation Warden or Water Management Specialist first!

There are many phenomenal wildlife viewing areas, fishing spots, and hunting areas that can be legally accessed through our navigable waterways. Get out there and find them, without trespassing!

For more information please contact Kristy Rogers @ 920-424-7885.❖

'Tis the Season *continued from page 1*

Our work didn't end after planting. During the months that followed, these restorations required extra care so that the weeds didn't take over. This was primarily accomplished through mowing. The general rule of thumb after a prairie has been planted is to allow the weeds to grow to approximately 1.5 feet, then mow the area down to approximately 6 inches. This cuts off the taller weed seed-heads while leaving the shorter prairie plants intact, giving the native vegetation a competitive edge. Speaking of those weeds and competitors, next on the agenda was our war against Canada thistle. We have been making time to do spot herbicide treatments and mowings before the thistle goes to seed. With the onset of fall, we have begun cutting firebreaks in preparation for next spring's burn season.

On the wetland front we have been busy constructing projects that were designed over the winter. We are keeping local contractors busy breaking tile lines, plugging ditches, and building dikes to restore formally drained wetland basins. Over 30 projects have been completed resulting in the restoration of 100 acres of wetlands.

That's the overview of what's been happening in the GHRA. Stay tuned, in the next issue we'll take a look at some of the equipment that we use to accomplish these ongoing projects.❖

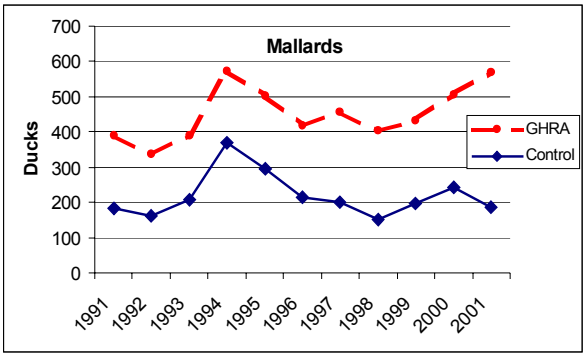
DUCK SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN

By Ron Gatti
WDNR Biologist, Monona

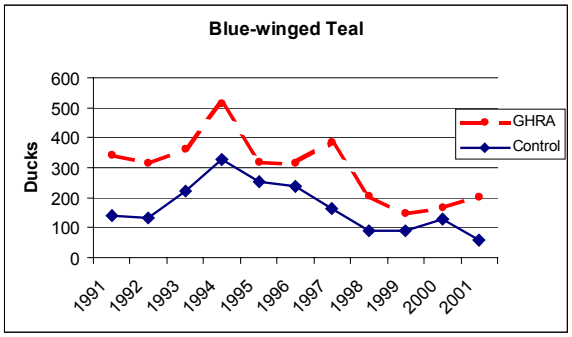
The summary of the 2001 GHRA Duck Survey has been completed. The survey is completed as follows: 2 observers census waterfowl and large waterbirds from a helicopter on 21 ¼-mile wide strip transects (124 mi²) in the GHRA and adjacent control areas (10% of the GHRA is covered) during the last week in April or first week in May. This survey includes several major public properties (Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area, White River Marsh Wildlife Area, Eldorado Marsh Wildlife Area, and Uihlein Waterfowl Production Area) as well as the private landscape. The 2001 survey was flown on May 2, 8, and 9, after the main waterfowl migration had passed through.

Twenty-two waterfowl species and 15 other waterbird species were observed during 1991-2001 in this survey. Groups of over 4 ducks or over 2 geese or cranes were excluded to reduce some of the variance that these non-breeders would add.

Mallards and Blue-winged Teal are the primary duck species of interest, but Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, and Wood Ducks also nest in the GHRA and are fairly well indexed by the survey. Although Redheads and Ruddy Ducks nest in the GHRA, they are not well indexed because of the timing of their migration. Other duck species very rarely nest in the GHRA. In 2001 we found decreases compared to 2000 in Mallards (-5%), Blue-winged Teal (-18%), Wood Ducks (-54%), Northern Shovelers (-71%), and Ruddy Ducks (-25%), while Redhead numbers increased (+38%). Overall there were decreases in total dabbling ducks (-12%) and total ducks (-15%).

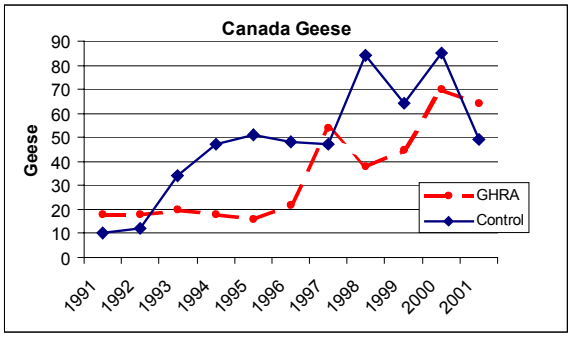


There has been no linear trend over the 11 years of the survey for any of these groups except Blue-winged Teal, which show a decline over time that averages 7.8%/year. Mallards generally increased from 1991-94, decreased during 1994-98, then increased again 1998-2001. Mallards are 7% above the 1991-2000 mean, while Blue-winged Teal are 51% below the 10-year mean. The statewide duck survey shows a similar pattern for Mallards but does not show the decline for Blue-winged Teal found in this more intensive survey over the same years.



There has been no relationship between duck numbers and the GHRA management to date. Annual changes in duck numbers on the GHRA and control areas are generally mirroring each other, although 2001 found the highest proportion of Mallards and teal on the GHRA in 11 years.

Canada Goose numbers (excluding groups) decreased 27% in 2001; however, over the 11 survey years they show a pattern of increase averaging +14%/year. Geese are increasing at similar rates on both the GHRA and control areas, unrelated to management. We only saw 1 Mute Swan on the survey in 2001.



Of the other marsh birds seen on the survey only Sandhill Cranes are reliably indexed because of their abundance and solitary nesting/feeding behavior. Fewer cranes (excluding groups over 2) were seen in 2001 (-19%) than in 2000. However, crane numbers have increased from 1991-2001 at the rate of 17%/year and breeding crane numbers in 2001 were the second highest recorded in 11 years. The rate of increase in crane numbers is unrelated to the GHRA management. American Coots have a clustered distribution, primarily at Horicon Marsh and Rush Lake. Coot numbers increased 17% in 2001 and they are at the 1991-00 average. Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets are surveyed during foraging throughout the area, but not at their nesting colonies. Great Blue Herons decreased 10% while Great Egrets increased 31% in 2001; both are near the average counts of 1991-00. Double-crested Cormorants are also clustered in distribution at large lakes and marshes; they again decreased (-64%) in 2001 to the lowest level since 1992. We saw White Pelicans again in 2001 and also saw a Bald Eagle for the first time on this survey (on Horicon National Wildlife Refuge).❖

GETTING OUR FEET WET

By Eric Lobner
WDNR Biologist-Horicon

Compared to the drainage and filling of wetlands for agricultural use, the concept of restoring wetlands is new and not as well understood. To improve our understanding of wetland restoration, the GHRA staff incorporated the help of volunteer intern Angela Sette to monitor restored basins. Angela studied the plant communities and water depths of wetland projects completed within the GHRA. Those of you from Fox Lake, Westford, and Calamus townships in Dodge County, Courtland and Fountain Prairie in Columbia County, and Alto and Metomen in Fond du Lac County may have met Angela over the summer, as she focused on those townships.

Throughout the summer Angela catalogued such things as wetland type (sedge meadow, shallow marsh, etc.), water depth, plant species, adjacent land usage, and wildlife usage. All of the restored wetlands were plotted on aerial photos in our geographic information program, Arcview, and linked to digital photos taken on site of each of the wetlands. The goal is to have every restored wetland in the GHRA monitored periodically and use the information to study how the wetlands change over time. This information will provide a better understanding of what factors affect wetland restorations and will help with the planning of future projects. Since Angela didn't have enough time to monitor all the restored wetlands in the GHRA, it is expected that we will have an intern each summer who will monitor selected townships on a revolving basis.

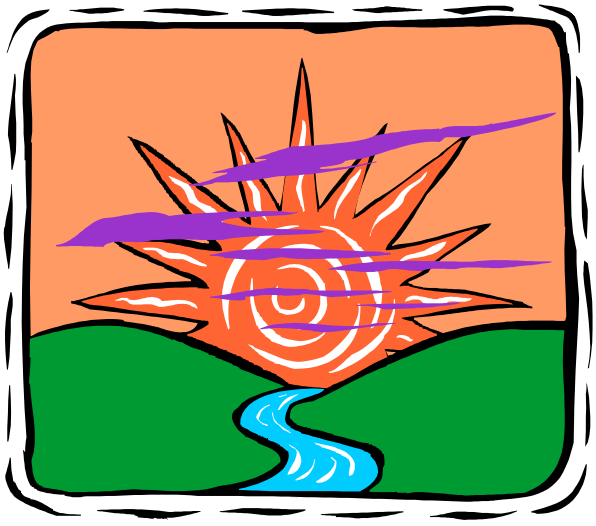
The results at this point are still being analyzed, however most restorations have some open water with portions of sedge or fresh meadows. The wetlands tend to be covered with between 20% and 50% emergent vegetation, a percentage that is favored by waterfowl, with the dominant species being cattail or softstem bulrush. Future study will look at submergent vegetation as well as how the species composition changes over time. Stay tuned!❖

GHRA STAFF LEAVE FOR NEW POSITIONS

Brian Glenzinski and Tim Connolly will be leaving their temporary DNR jobs with the GHRA at the end of September this year. Brian was the Wetland Habitat Coordinator for the project since spring 2000 and was responsible for restoring over 150 acres of wetlands in 50 basins. Many of these restorations were on degraded land that previously had little value for wildlife. Additionally, Brian provided technical restoration advice to private landowners and other conservation agencies. In the future Brian will be working on a contract basis for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service doing wetland restorations.

Tim Connolly was the GHRA wildlife technician working out of the Oshkosh office since January 2000. Tim conducted much of the "on the ground" grassland restoration work in the northern portion of the GHRA as well as various other land management activities such as burning, posting, and mowing. Over 600 acres of prairie were restored in the northern GHRA during Tim's tenure.

Both Tim and Brian contributed immensely to the wildlife habitat work completed over the past two field seasons in the GHRA. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their accomplishments, their dedication will certainly be missed.❖



GOOD LUCK!

FUNDING THE GHRA

By Eric Lobner
WDNR Biologist - Horicon

Running a program that focuses on purchasing and putting easements on property and restoring and maintaining grasslands and wetlands can be a costly business. Combine that with an ever reducing pot of money identified for conservation and you have a mixture very similar to oil and water . . . they just don't mix.

To help overcome some of the financial shortfall's of the state funded GHRA program, a variety of grants are applied for, in particular the federally funded North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant program.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989 provides matching grants to private or public organizations or to individuals who have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The Act was passed, in part, to support activities under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international agreement that provides a strategy for the long-term protection of wetlands and associated uplands needed by waterfowl and other migratory birds in North America.

Congress appropriated $40 million for NAWCA projects in Fiscal Year 2001. Additional funding comes from moneys received from fines, penalties, and forfeitures under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and from interest accrued on the fund established under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937.

Since the initiation of the grant program, the GHRA has applied for and received three separate NAWCA grants, with the most recent ending this coming September 30, 2001. When you add the three grants together, the NAWCA program has put $2,010,000 towards the development and preservation of wildlife populations throughout the entire project area! It has certainly helped out considerably towards meeting the habitat goals of the GHRA.

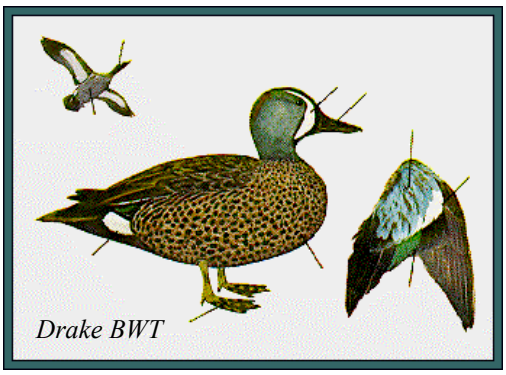
But it doesn't end there. We have recently submitted a fourth grant request asking for an additional $1 million! This grant application has brought together many new and interested partners including the Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust and the Green Lake Sanitary District, as well as several familiar partners such as Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy. Without the involvement of these groups, it would be impossible for the wildlife management program of the WDNR to complete the GHRA project.❖

GHRA Species Profile

Blue-Winged Teal

By Brenda Hill
WDNR Biologist-Horicon

Scientifically named Anas discors, both female and male blue-winged teal are commonly named for their light blue covert feathers. The female is a mottled brown color and the male is easily recognized in spring plumage by its large white crescent shaped patch in front of the eye. They are a small North American duck, the males weighing in at an average of 1 pound and the females less than a pound.


Drake BWT

They are one of the "dabbling" ducks, meaning that they skim food from the waters surface or bottom feed in shallow areas by tipping forward and submerging their heads and necks to reach food. Their diet consists of aquatic vegetation and invertebrates and insects. They also have the ability to take off vertically and descend into small areas with precision.

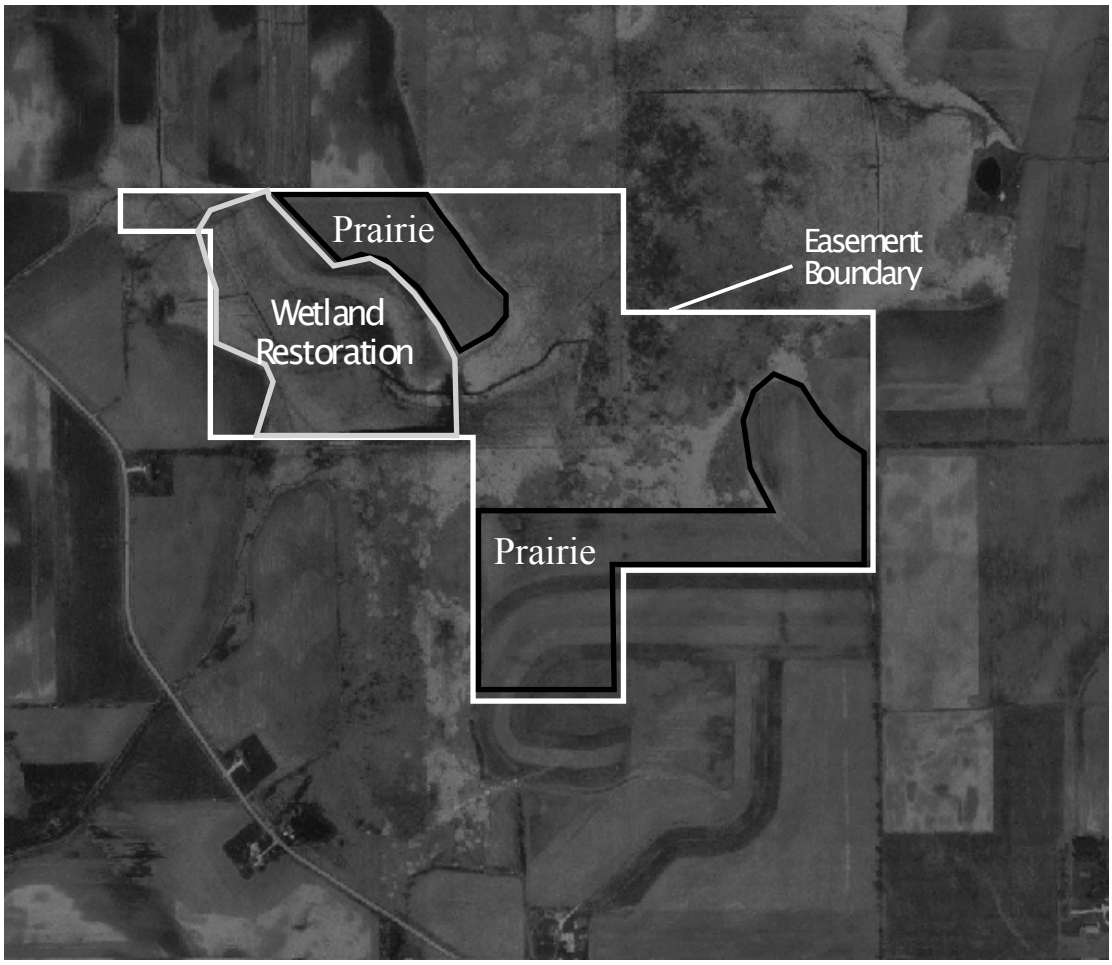
"Blue-wings" are a common summer resident to our area. The first ones were observed arriving this spring in Dodge County on April 3rd. The female will build a nest on the ground, as early as the first of May, and uses the grasses for concealment. She'll lay 8-12 cream colored eggs, one a day, and after the last one is laid, she'll spend the next 24 days incubating. Its been recorded that birds still found incubating the first of July are renesting after previous failures.

Enroute to the southern United States, or as far as northern South America, Blue-wings are usually the first migrants to head south in the fall.

The Glacial Habitat Restoration Area program recognizes Blue-winged Teal, along with other waterfowl, grassland songbirds, and ring-necked pheasants as focal management species in our prairies.❖

GHRA Featured Property

The Reitzner Easement



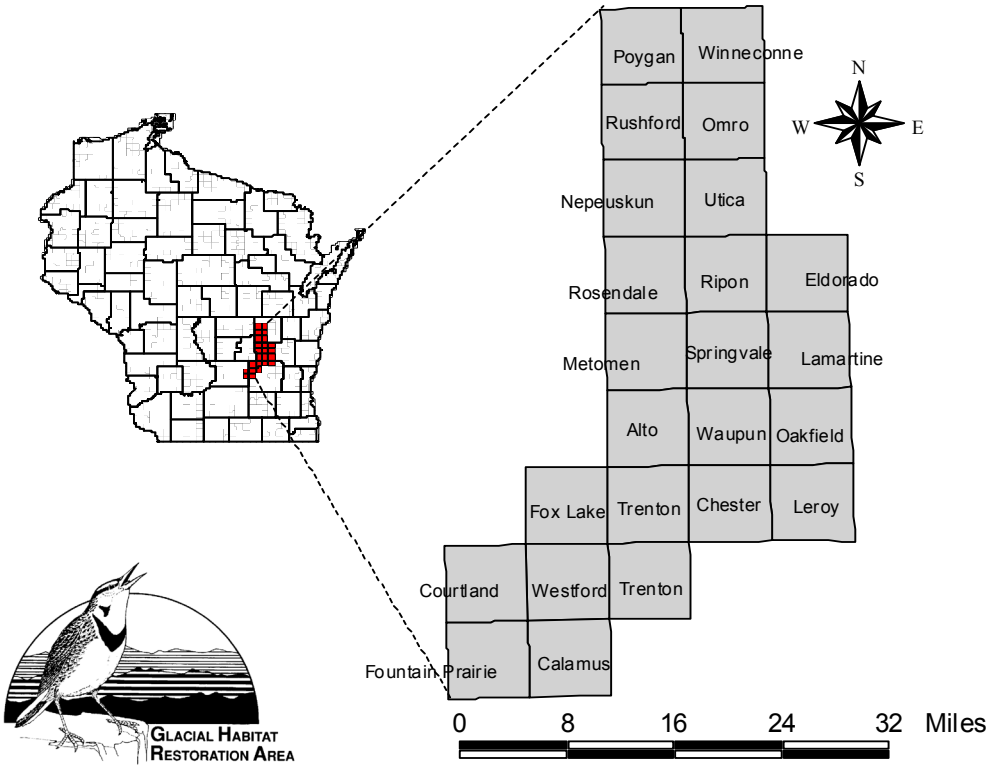
Landowners: Jim and Sue Ellen Reitzner
Location: Lamartine Township, Fond du Lac County
Size: 150 Acres

The Reitzner's entered their land into the GHRA easement program in 1994 with 69 acres. In 1996, they purchased an adjacent property with an existing GHRA easement to bring the total easement acreage up to 150. GHRA staff has planted two separate areas to native prairie and has completed two wetland projects on the property. Other property features include cattail marsh and oak knolls.

A water control structure was installed on one wetland restoration to allow managers to manipulate the water levels. During the summer the water level was drawn down to allow for dike repair and to rejuvenate the vegetation. Then, at summer's end, the water level was brought back up to provide habitat for our migrating waterfowl this fall. This spring we plan to conduct a prescribed burn on the prairie.

Two visits to the property during May revealed mallards, blue-winged teal, shovelers, common mergansers, and redheads that were taking full advantage of the wetland. Once we began lowering the water level and exposing mudflats, many different species of shorebirds were observed. Meadowlarks, bobolinks, and pheasants were seen and heard throughout the summer. These species are certainly not all you will find on this property, and as a former manager noted in his field log, it is a true show place for viewing wildlife.❖

Glacial Habitat Restoration Area and Staff



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